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Health Promotion And The Media In Solomon Islands

By

David Palapu
Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vijay Menon (Secretary General, AMIC), Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you very much for your attention and for this opportunity to let me present what I have here as part of my contribution to this important meeting focusing on "The Need to Involve the Media in Promoting Public Health and Nutrition in the South Pacific." I would like first of all to extend to you, Secretary-General of AMIC, Mr. Vijay Menon, sincere thanks from Mr. Patteson Mae, General Manager of the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation for inviting us to participate in this conference. I also would like to extend our sincere thanks to WHO, UNESCO, IPDC and AMIC for funding and other arrangements which made this Roundtable Conference possible.

My name is David Palapu and I am representing the SIBC for which I work and SIBC is of course in Solomon Islands.

BACKGROUND

Solomon Islands is an archipelago which lies about 9° south of the Equator occupying roughly a triangular slot of the Western Pacific due east of Papua New Guinea. Solomon Islands has a total sea and land area of 27 thousand square miles and only slightly over a quarter of this is land mass. There are six major islands: Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Malaita, Guadalcanal and San Aristobal. The capital, Honiara, is situated on Guadalcanal where many bloody battles were fought during World War II in 1942 between American and Japanese forces. The archipelago consists of about three hundred smaller islands of varying sizes and shapes. The very tiny ones are uninhabited.
The population of Solomon Islands today is made up of Chinese, Gilbertese, a minority of Fijians and Europeans and the two main indigenous races of Malanesians and Polynesians. The Polynesians live mainly on the outlying islands of the country. The next headcount is being planned in a National Census to be held towards the end of this year, 1986. However, it is estimated that the country's population, going at a rate of 3.4%, is nearing 3 hundred thousand people; but it could have gone well past the estimate. It is still maintained that about 80% of the population live in the rural areas.

**ECONOMY**

The country's main export earnings are derived from copra, timber fish, palm oil and some marine products. These include trochus shells, bech-demer, shark fins and turtle shells. Apart from machinery, tools and equipment and clothes, beverages, and other consumer goods are imported to cater for the towns people and people other than Solomon Islanders living and working in the wountry. These include fresh vegetables, corn, chicken and eggs and rice just to name a few.

But in the rural areas the people are mostly self-sufficient unless disturbed by natural disasters like cyclone Namu which hit the country in May this year, claiming more than one hundred lives.

In the rural areas people grow their own yam, dana, cassava and kumara with local varieties of cabbage and vegetables. In tradition, families keep and rear a lot of pigs and poultry and there is no doubt that the father or even the son occasionally returns from the sea with a good catch of fish for the day's meal. Coconut is widely used to make home kaikai, soup, and even oil.

**MEDICAL AND FACILITIES**

In the Solomon Islands there are now one hundred and twenty-two clinics, thirty-one Rural Health Centres and eighty-six village aid posts which provide very basic health and medical services. The main referral hospital is in Honiara and there are four other government hospitals in four main Provincial Centres. Two
other private hospitals are run by two church groups in the country. The country has only 38 trained and qualified doctors and they work in the main hospitals. There are 392 nurses in the country with 164 trained nurse aids and 20 untrained nurse aids. In the area of Environmental Health there are 136 people on the staff and 242 are in the Anti-Malaria Programme, including those that spray the bush and houses.

MEDIA IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

In the print media there are four weeklies. This included one which is published by the Government Information Service. The language used in all the newspapers is English and with fairly high illiteracy rate especially in the rural areas the papers only serve a minority in Honiara and at the Provincial Headquarters.

AUDIO MEDIA

The history of radio broadcasting in the Solomon Islands dates back to the early 1940's when transmitter and radio equipment used by the American Military during World War II were taken over or rather abandoned by the U.S. Military forces when the war was over.

Broadcasting in the Solomons has developed rapidly during the past ten years. From a broadcasting service, SIBS became a corporate body in 1976 when the then Legislative Assembly passed a broadcasting ordinance that established what is now known as the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation, SIBC. As a corporate body, SIBC was given a wide range of responsibilities which include deciding music and programme policies and it is directed by a Board of Directors. The organisation employs about 60 workers and it operates on an annual budget of about US$250,000 of which more than 57% is Government subsidy. The station sells programmes and air-time to top up the balance of the budget.

SIBC has its main studio in Honiara the capital of Solomon Islands. It has two regional stations which act as relay stations in the mornings. The stations are situated in the eastern and western parts of the country respectively.
From Honiara, SIBC broadcasts 15 1/2 hours a day on weekdays and 18 hours a day on weekends. The station opens at 6:00 a.m. and closes at 1:30 p.m. and opens again at 4:00 p.m. to midnight. The regional stations carry their own regional programmes for about 4 hours each day starting at 4:00 p.m. but with intermittent crossbacks to the National Service for the news and service messages. Pijin English is the language used on radio.

SIBC has a main medium wave transmitter of 10 kw and a standby transmitter of 5 kw plus two main short-wave transmitters of 10 kw and a 5 kw standby transmitter. The regional station in the west has a main transmitter of 10 kw while the eastern regional station only has a 5 kw transmitter.

As a valuable development tool and an instrument of change, SIBC created within the organisation a division called the Rural Broadcasting Development Unit. The unit functions to produce developmental programmes on agriculture conservation and environment and health programmes. A health programme is broadcast twice daily. Each alternating week the programme carries certain issues such as malaria, hygiene, sanitation and nutrition, cure and prevention of certain types of diseases and so on. On the alternating week, the programme features the life story of an imaginary child called Hobsun, invented for the series. There is a daily programme produced for children and a weekly programme for women. Besides these programmes, the staff of the Rural Division also produce for broadcast 30-second or 60-second radio spots. Spots on nutrition were produced and broadcast last year but these were withdrawn when Save the Children's Fund from Australia decided to cancel its sponsorship of the nutrition spots. Similarly, a daily malaria programme had to be suspended for the same reason.

SIBC advertises beer and cigarettes and some junk food.

PROBLEMS

SIBC is faced with money problems to provide better service especially in health and nutrition. Its responsibility of meeting
the balance of its annual budget creates a tough policy on programming for development as sponsorship of programmes and air-time payment is given priority.

There is a need to train Health Educators in basic radio productions. There is an inability to conduct research to evaluate the effectiveness of the radio spots and programmes.